Reading Michael Joyce's biography, it seems that he lives and has lived many lives. One could encounter his work a number of ways: as a student, a collaborator, a fiction reader, an interested party in online and/or hypertext fiction, or an interested party in technology and how it affects peoples' lives. I encountered his work via the online route; firstly writing a basic post—graduate essay about hyperfiction— fiction that uses and relies on hyperlinks within its structure— including his *afternoon: a story*, commonly accepted as the "granddaddy of hyperfiction". My essay then developed into a wider interest and dissertation about how "readers" navigate hypertext fiction, and how theorists such as Joyce view these readings.

So it was with much interest that I tackled another starting point to Joyce's work— the reading of a print fiction; a "traditional" novel, at least in the sense of it being a paper—based portable object. *Liam's Going* is a book with a seemingly simple story—a story of a mother driving her son to college— the first time he will live away; the boy's father at home; and the relationships between all three being happy and loving. But the story has undercurrents, as the main characters— particularly the parents, Cathleen and Noah—examine events in their pasts, which shape and colour their lives and existence, and their relationships with each other. Liam, on the other hand, is keen to enter his future; to move away and start his adult life.

I mostly read *Liam's Going* whilst travelling by train to work, dipping in and out of the storylines, and sometimes re—reading from before where I'd left off previously. This seemed appropriate, as the repetition and rewriting and recreating in the book is also a strength—the movement of and between people and places. The stories created by and linking Cathleen and Noah often reappear in different guises—the same event viewed by a different person, or viewed from a different place and time. This linking of times and places (and people) is important in the book, and works well—the undercurrents or events and thoughts surface and submerge with equal clarity.

The setting—the Hudson River Valley—informs and tells the different moods and scenes contained in the book. Noah's encounters with an elderly client of his law practice are steeped in the river's myths and eddies, and these in turn help to describe his memories. So too, Cathleen's reliving of a long—gone love affair almost becomes part of the landscape she drives Liam through. In a potent passage, Joyce describes how Cathleen and Noah attempt to create a pond in their lawn, eventually surrendering to the inevitability of its reclamation by the land itself: "A place has a self". That the people have a sense of self that is reflected in the land(scape) flows throughout the book, and is one of its most effective notions.

It is easy to move into poetical language when talking about *Liam's Going*, especially when describing the physicality of place; the river(s) of the stories. Joyce is a great wordsmith, and there are many breathtaking moments of prose contained in the book. I wondered sometimes,

however, who was speaking — the author or his character? Occasionally I suspected the former; the thoughts and ideas sometimes seem too academic, too poetical, too deep even, for the people described. Occasionally also, the language becomes too much, too flowery; the wordplay— delightfully wrought though it is— overpowers the storyline.

That said, there are also moments in the book of great emotion and clarity—for example when Cathleen recollects her first meeting with her lover Paul. These are more real, and I was at times greatly moved by descriptions of events. *Liam's Going* is a very human book about very human people — their relationships, their sense(s) of self; the way they weave in and out of each others lives; their lives and the many ways these can be told. This is not surprising in a book by a writer of and about hypertextual work. The author's use of hypertext — like the retelling of events and people mentioned earlier — is very much evident, and its use in the novel is appropriate and well crafted, making for a multi-layered and complex narrative.

As I finished the book, I became aware that the stories do not end, but move on, like the Hudson. Each character is undergoing their own rite of passage, informed and fed by events in their past and present; but also their future. I was glad of this non-ending, not just in relation to my hyperfictional interests, but because it underlines the humanity and complexity of the book. There is much to be enjoyed in *Liam's Going*, and any criticisms about style are small in a work of great beauty.

Email interview between Mary Cavill and Michael Joyce, conducted over a period of two weeks in late October 2002.

Cavill: Reading your work, there seem to be many threads running through it, and the idea of threads as a(n) emphasised background(s) to events. I'm thinking about the idea of linking; brought about by technology but also between people, time and places — the threads that we as people create through our lives. I wondered if this is something you're aware of, or have consciously described? Do the patterns created by and between the characters in your fictional work interest you?

Joyce: I think it is a wonderful question to start from. My immediate inclination is to respond that "the patterns created by and between the characters" are my sole interest, but almost immediately I realize that is too strong a claim. Rather say that what we are to each other, what characters are, is a prismatic pattern of presence, an inevitable and unavoidable interweaving and intermixture of place and other, moment and aspiration. These are threads in the sense that the slipstream threads transparently behind the swimmer. That is, they are as much a part of the medium and the moment and something "we create through our lives."

I suspect these hydraulic images are on my mind partly because *Liam's Going* is a riverine novel and at least in part contemporaneous with a hypertext work of mine, *Twelve Blue*, whose compositional method literally involved threads which I very "consciously described" at some length in an essay called "Forms of Future" in *Othermindedness*:

> The title screen contains a drawing of twelve colored threads running horizontally across a field of blue. The drawing came first, its threads creating a kind of score

in the sense of John Cage, a continuity of the various parallel narratives. When the threads veer nearer to each other – or in at least one instance cross – so do their narratives. The twelve lines became months but also characters or pairings of them as well (that is, sometimes a character has her own line and another line she shares with someone paired to her, although not necessarily within the narrative threads). The twelve threads do not start with January at the top but rather November, the year of my year. I then made eight different cuts across the Y axis, though in my mind they were more fabric strips or something like William Burrough's compositional cuts. These cuts are mapped on the opening screen ... creating a succession of thematic sections.

Within these eight longitudinal strips the various stories take place and intermingle. Obviously however since narrative goes forward horizontally and time here is represented vertically, there is something of a displacement in which events along a single thread in fact violate the larger time of the characters sensibilities. Thus the drowning deaf boy of the story floats across various threads through different seasons until his body surfaces at the end.

This was for me a very formal exercise, an attempt to come to terms with what seemed the constraints of the web but also a quasi-Oulipian generative scheme.

Twelve Blue is something of the gothic counterpart, the dark imagining, to the brighter prospect of *Liam's Going*, with which it shares other thematic concerns. We live by the river, the Hudson, and that of course brings one to mind of what you call "the idea of linking; brought about by technology but also between people, time and places." It is not an exaggeration to say that the Hudson served as the first network in America, and its technologies, which besides the steamboat included the paintings of the Hudson River School, the literatures of the mountains and valleys, and so on, remain imprinted upon our understanding of the river as an imaginary screen for our consciousness. Surely it seems as much to Cathleen in my novel, who at one point thinks "O the world was a series of stories ... a gap in the wall, windows in windows, everything linked, the whole world strung with unnoticed silk."

Cavill: What you say about the Hudson is very interesting. It does seem a strong motif in *Liam's Going*; as I read, I felt that the story(ies) didn't end (which I was glad of), they ebb and flow along with the water. Could you say more about your ideas about a/the sense of place?

Joyce: First off, I'm of course delighted that you feel the stories do not end, not merely in how that affirms a hypertextuality even in this simple book, but especially since the attempt here was to create a weave of threshold stories, what in her afterword to *Moral Tales and Meditations* Hélène Cixous so generously called "tales of almost ... the glancing contact of differences brushing against each other." All of the main characters are poised at the edge of such important, and yet not culminatory but rather continuous (flowing), change in their lives. I meant Cathleen and Noah to be happy in their love and marriage and, largely, in the selves, the poet, lawyer, mother, father they are; but they also know that happiness is not enough, that they have to summon themselves to this flow, they have to greet each other anew in "the thin milk light of earliest morning" where the novel (but not the stories) ends. Liam is, of course, most clearly

poised at the brink of that kaleidoscopic dive into a spectrum of selves and possibilities with which we all move from adolescent into adulthood. So too, more tranquilly, floating under stairs, napping in her cabin, never quite telling Noah her truest story, Antoinette is poised to see through death just as she has seen through her other, quite literal, passages as a woman.

Cavill: My connections here: Cathleen's notion about a place having a "self" [the passage about the created pond not surviving because of this struck me very strongly]; the idea of the space between places and people – I'm thinking about you describing the "uncertain and increasingly virtual path between the classroom and the library" but also its usefulness. This is perhaps related to physical and/or virtual presence, which you talk about in *Othermindedness* also…

Joyce: This is a lovely proposition for me, a connection I hadn't made so directly. Yes, of course, what's missing in the virtual, at least as it has been present(ed) to us thus far, is its selfhood. You know, oddly enough, in a very early essay in *Of Two Mi*nds I wrote a meditation about VR and perspectives, how we create spaces for and of each other, from and through each other's perspectives:

> The interdeterminability of points of perception argues against a virtual reality which depends upon successive disclosures of self—generating spaces ... A woman walks toward me and passes, for all I know wordlessly, yet I believe that she too creates the space she walks through and that it is somehow different from mine. (That is, there is no point from which to see, even in 3-space, each new point in its own perspectives.)

This, in turn (ah the endless trace, the link) puts me in mind of Giorgio Agamben's important claim in *The Coming Comm*unity that:

> To appropriate the historic transformations of human nature that capitalism wants to limit to the spectacle, to link together image and body in a space where they can no longer be separated, and to thus forge the whatever body, whose physis is resemblance–this is the good humanity must learn to wrest from commodities in their decline.

That link of "image and body in a space where they can no longer be separated" can only be dynamic, can only be com-memoration, remembering together. For Gabriel Marcel it is the only act we have, the measure of our humanity, the denial of death. It is what a family does with its love, what story means to do, what place does as it comes to have a self, as it becomes.

Your question also brought to mind Jay Bolter's and my original Storyspace interface which called its containers "spaces" and the contained spaces (the boxes within boxes) "places". It was language that from a user interface perspective was unworkable but was, I think, the thinking which propelled us into developing a "writing system" that deconstructed its own systemization, whose hierarchies were blurred and permeated by the flow between space and place. Pure space becomes place by proximity, particularity, presence. The Hudson around here where we live is not its most spectacular; just South of here the highlands which draw in and transform Cathleen and Liam as they travel over Storm King (the latter phrase, by the way, was the novel's working

title) begin. Further south the river widens into bays and then the palisades before the city. North are the mountain and valley vistas of the Hudson River School landscape, thinning to a bright thread in the Adirondack headlands. We are at the middle, soft hills, placid and deep water (only just now, in November as I write, coming back to us as the docks of the marina are removed). I think we are fortunate in this. The day-to-dayness of this space make us more attentive over time, of time. It is increasingly commonplace knowledge that the Native Americans called this the "river that flows both ways" because as an estuary its current is tidally determined. Here that flow is slow surface, like flesh. You come to know a space like this as a self, as you come (however awkwardly and uncertainly) to know yourself. This, too – or especially, informs the journeys of *Liam's Going*.

Cavill: I'm led to thinking about the physicalness of the act of writing – quite a leap perhaps! – but are there connections? In a basic way, are your sensual surroundings – geography, technology, sound perhaps also – essential to the writing process? I'm wondering also about the differences in the writing process according to the intended 'product' – electronic, print, spoken? (I'm thinking here about the affirmation of hypertextuality in *Liam's Going* you mentioned)

Joyce: I suppose by the question about intended product you mean an awareness of the book's insistent physicality versus the diffuse physicality of the screen (I promise not, this time at least, to quote myself again but I do have a sort of meditative chant about book and screen, the recto— verso essay in *Of Two Minds*). I'm not sure whether those difference are as much in mind as are the differences between the elastic surface of the word processor screen – even one in a Storyspace window – and the immanence and ghosted past of the book's page to page progress.

You may mean another matter entirely, or at least I will respond to another. For years my students have heard me say as a kind of koan, "writing is a physical act", by which I mean not only the tactility and visuality of the page or screen, but the breath and heft, the proprioceptive quality that the poet Charles Olson (whose poetic, projective verse was breath) summoned long before VR began to measure experience so, how the body knows within itself. Even with *afternoon* I saw the text as physical, erotic, the touch that gives way in the "words that yield", a sense of the link as a drawing apart of fabric, a seeing through layers. For his interactive cinema work, *Sonata*, Grahame Weinbren devised a lovely a touch screen interface which involves exactly this drawing apart. Grahame may as much have meant to evoke the curtains which used to whisper open before a film rather than the mutuality of the lover's unveiling that I had in mind.

All that said, I do know you also meant to ask a simple question about work habits: CD on? light from the west or south? boxers or briefs? and so on. I used to worry over these things when I was younger, needed a surround, space beyond and behind me, and so on. That's all gone. *Twelve Blue* I wrote in the garden by the river, Powerbook on my lap; *Liam's* mostly at the desk in my coffin-sized study (but also in hotel rooms here and there while away doing gigs). One thing I can say is that I cannot work with music on, this may be because language is so musical for me, or perhaps it is simply a generational marker (my kids and most of my students cannot by and large work without music).

Cavill: I'm interested particularly in what you say about the relationship between writing and music – a connection that isn't made often enough I think – the musicality of words (I know you talk about this in other writings also).

Joyce: The musicality of words can't, I think, be divorced from the physicality of writing, which of course was the context in which I addressed it in my last response. I believe we carry language in breath and in depth and in our own sense of our movement in space. I hear words in movement, when I'm walking or my fingers are typing or writing with a pen, other movements as well. Otherwise I think I am largely dumb, in every sense of that word. Language comes at the instant of some motion toward and in myself. I think some of that has been lost, however temporarily, in current electronic arts. Not just the pure musicality, the surface poetry, but the sense of language as embodied action.

Cavill: I need to dive in here and ask an obvious – and I hope pertinent rather than impertinent – question: I wonder if you'd be willing to talk about why you've moved "back" to print writing? I'm thinking particularly about the way your work is so hypertextual in its musical form; although I know the question is wider than that.

Joyce: There is no back here, is there? It's a permeation, a flow, the river that flows two ways, a dance, the lovers' mutual unveiling. As I said earlier, I wrote at least part of *Liam's* while writing hypertexts and vice versa. They participate in each other's economy. In each other's weather, like the swirl of high and low pressure. Whatever decisions I've made about my writing or thinking life are first of all ones so new I as yet hardly understand them, and so it can't be said, I can't myself say, I'm moving this way or that. In any case I do not see myself as returning to the novel in the sense of having left it, but rather returning in the way you return to what has never left you, like the family or the place where you grew up. I never did not write for print, those are facts of life for an artist and academic, an occasional poet. Likewise there was never a claim that hypertext was an enabling technology, rather than it was a representative one. Indeed the musicality of language and – despite current intoxicated claims for innovation – the visuality, dynamism and kinetics of language as well were concerns of the whole of twentieth century literary arts: Stein and Joyce, Calvino and Cixous, Futurismo, the Surrealists, Oulipo, L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E poetry. No from and to. Computers arrived as more amiable machines for many of these purposes. Other more amiable machines or modalities may come behind them.

I like that image, futures as a sort of Macy's Parade of amiable machines. Tinguely contraptions but soft as clouds, moving across oceans, white sands, to Potsdamer Platz, Temple Bar, the Renaissance Center, West Edmonton Mall, the Zocalo in Mexico City, downtown Tenochtitlan. No from and to, only the to and fro, the swirl and flow, of clouds.

Cavill: Despite my hesitation to use the word "back", I'm now going to use the "forward", to ask about your time as Professor of English and the Library, which you talk about so beautifully in *Othermindedness*. I was particularly struck by your description of the institution and library being founded on a "tradition of change". Did/has this role alter/ed your perception(s) of a sense of time, of archiving, of the collected and collectable, in the "electronic age"?

Joyce: Very much so. At Vassar we have a large space in the library, not a lab or a classroom, open to the stacks and reading tables and overlooking our main reading room, which I had the honor of naming the Media Cloisters. In our online descriptions and program literature we describe the cloisters as a public sphere for networked interaction, the gathering place for students, professors, and librarians engaged in planning, evaluating, or reviewing the efforts of research and study utilizing the whole range of technologies of literacy. We go further and describe the task of the cloisters as to "channel flows of research, learning and teaching between the increasingly networked world of the library and the intimacy and engagement of our classrooms and other campus spaces". There we continue to explore the "collectable object", which I tentatively described in *Othermindedness* in terms of maintaining an archive of "the successive choices, the errors and losses, of our own human community" and suggesting that what constitutes the collectable object is the value which suffuses our choices. It seemed to me then that electronic media are especially suited to tracking such "changing change".

I think it still seems so to me now, but I do fear we have lost track of the beauty and nimbleness of new media in representing and preserving the meaning—making quotidian, the ordinary mindfulness which makes human life possible and valuable.

It is interesting, I think, that recounting and rehearsing this notion leaves this interview layered and speckled with (self) quotations, documentations, implicit genealogies, images, and traditions of continuity, change, and difference. Perhaps the most quoted line of *afternoon* over the years has been the sentence "There is no simple way to say this." The same is true of any attempt to describe the way in which the collectable object participates in (I use this word as a felicitous shorthand for the complex of ideas involved in what I called "representing and preserving the meaning—making quotidian" above) the library as living archive.

Derrida begins his meditation on Freud, *Archive Fever*, by reminding us of the etymology of archive: "Arkhe," he says, "names at once the commencement and the commandment." What begins, as well as what we are called upon to do by men and gods, he says is an act of consignation, by which "we do not only mean the ordinary sense of the word – to put into reserve (to consign, to deposit) in a place – but here also the act of con—signing through gathering together signs".

Any archive begins and commands a gathering together of signs, around signs, in signs. One of the glories of new media has been their ability to gather and capture such signs, heartfelt glimpses of commencement and commandment, which is to say of beginning again and holding ourselves to the memory of what matters. The multiplicity of everyday events and voices, whether in hyperfiction or the archive, gives lie to the grand and corrosive deception of the bumper sticker propaganda we are assailed with by warmongering and fear-filled politicians who wrest day-to-day human tragedy to serve a simplistic and jingoistic claim that united we stand. Our archives like our fictions and other arts assure us of what we know and value in our day-to-day lives, how we stand strongest in our multiplicities and in our differences, in the gathering together of the fragments and gestures which are signs of our unique being and our intention to live together and sustain each other in community.

Cavill: I see the quotations – self and other – also as threads through your work, reference points and anchors, like the physicality of the river(s). Going back, was there anyone/thing that originally inspired you to write? And now – could you say who are your influences and inspiration? (I say "thing" as well as "one", thinking about the influence of and relationship with technology, which you write about particularly in *Moral Tales and Meditations*.)

Joyce: You are right to frame this question around *Moral Tales and Meditations* because it accounts the inspirations of place and home, which I have also written about elsewhere, especially in my first print novel, *The War Outside Ireland*, an exploration of how we are formed by stories. In the American-Irish-Catholic ghetto of South Buffalo that I wrote about there stories are shaped by the flow of the "family mind" which authors our stories for – and of – us and over which the mother presides, apportioning lots and roles alike. There were eight of us kids, four each from the then-available genders, and thus there were many stories and the family mind was quadraphonic, if not schizo (or octo) -phrenic. All my brothers and sisters became story tellers, some professionally as teachers, writers, actors, comics, ministers. The earliest writings I recall were childhood stories which I bound up like little novels, complete with illustrations: a boy with magic pills, a cowboy who in retrospect seems to anticipate Don Quixote. When I made the first one, I was probably not much older than five and my audience was, like most American-Irish kids, my mother.

In other settings I've also said that I discovered the power of family stories both literally and figuratively lingering under the table in the kitchen among the aunts and listening to how they held the world together with stories and laughter and whispered complaints my young ears couldn't pick out from the din. It was both an idyllic and a chaotic time of the kind the Pogues sing about in their raucous elegy "Body of an American". The men were elsewhere, drinking whiskey and beer and telling their own stories. The other kids were still farther away, heading toward twilight, shouting in the streets, filching discount soda pop from the spanking new garbage cans which served as ice filled summer coolers. I was mesmerized by the women's stories, and especially how they told them again and again and again.

My influences when I came to write were largely figures from Paris in the 20s and before, which I think now I must have considered a grand literary and artistic family, ranging from Pound to Joyce to Stein especially. Stein has proved a sustaining influence with her layering voices, her origami prose style, her insistence on the beauties of ordinary language and life. The next major set of influences were French new wave filmmakers and writers, Godard, Truffaut, Varda, Robbe-Grillet, Duras and the poetics of Charles Olson. These days I am sustained by Cixous' constant attention to language and life, I revisit Calvino for the clarity of his multiple fictional and philosophical visions, I find Giorgio Agamben a prophet, I listen to Thomas Merton.

There is one other major influence, another wave in the rhythm of family, Paris, Black Mountain in my life, and that is the classroom. Teaching for me provides the necessary action within the world that provides the context and occasion for how to think. Teaching and learning for me involve a profound conversation wherein the mind is formed by and in community. I spent much of last year away on leave as something of a pilgrim, walking hours on end through an Italian countryside and a German city in successive seasons. During that time I was most often a silent witness to conversations which I by and large understood but, beyond the basics of day-to-day

existence, could not generate in return. As a writer, theorist, and teacher sometimes almost too glibly able to express myself and invite and instigate others to do so, I felt privileged to have this lesson in knowing silence and what it says about learning and the stories that form us alike.

Lastly and ever there is Carolyn Guyer, who is less an influence than the measure of my being, the wind through the trees as Pound's last Canto has it. Her early hypertext work was important to me and to many others in the way it led us to see the artfulness of daily life and the possibilities of attentive presence. The way she has turned her vision to building communities among disparate others humbles and energizes my life and art alike.

Cavill: My last question is related to the previous one in some ways; perhaps all previous questions. I'd like to ask a kind of "what next for you" question: can you say something about what are you working on now, which tides and eddies you are currently following?

Joyce: I wish I could say, quite literally wish that. In fact, I spend a good deal of time in such wishing (recall that afternoon has an often-quoted one line screen which begins, "I want to say..." where for me wanting is always a double of desire and lack). At the moment I am in something of a process of discernment, a difficult thing for someone used to making a racket or at least finding himself in the midst of buffeting potentialities. It happens that you ask me this question literally on the eve of my birthday, a time when, years ago and for years on end, I used to consider my life as if the eve itself were a set of auspices, a word which has its roots in how the auspex, the Roman augur, would study birds, whether the patterns in flight or the patterns in an array of bones. I'd rather flight than bones just now but it is probably not my lot to choose.

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